THE TRUE NATURE AND INFINITE IMPORTANCE OF RELIGION AND CHRISTIANITY OPENED AND VINDICATED.

DUBLIN:

Printed by S. POWELL, in Dame-ſtreet,

M,DCC,LXXIV.

THE TRUE NATURE AND INFINITE IMPORTANCE OF RELIGION, &c.

SECTION I.

IT is now very common to hear Religion ſpoken of with contempt, and perhaps deteſtation, and this by men of ſuch abilities and rank in the world, as a behaviour of this kind was leaſt to be expected from them; but a very moderate ſhare of conſideration muſt ſhew this to be moſt ſhamefully and criminally wrong. If we conſider religion with regard to the man himſelf, it conſiſteth in his giving to his ſuperior and governing faculties of reaſon and morality, that dominion over his lower and brutiſh nature of ſenſation, which it is manifeſt that they ought to have; and thereby preſerving him thoughtful, rational, chaſte, ſober, temperate, content, which is the beſt, and indeed the only means of keeping both body and ſoul in a ſtate of health and enjoyment, of ſaving him from the worſt of miſeries, and giving him the higheſt gratification in this life. If we conſider Religion with

regard to our fellow creatures, it consists in our behaving to them with such honesty, truth, faithfulness, tenderness, love, and goodness, as shall make us the greatest blessing to each other: And if we consider it with regard to our God, it consists in our acknowledging that there is such a Being, and behaving to him in a manner conformable to the relation which subsists between him and us. This is religion, and in the two first instances, the justness and nobleness of it, is not, cannot be denied; but the last with regard to our God must be farther opened.

The great prerogative of Man is, that he is exalted above brutish sense by reason and morality, and that as the first of these two latter faculties, gives him to know that there is a God, and that man hath such obligations to him, so the other obliges him to make returns to God suitable to these obligations.

Reason enables and requires the man to consider, so much, so that he can neither obtain the goods, nor avoid the evils of this life, but shall be absolutely ruined without it. Now this consideration ought to be employed about these matters, which are most noble in themselves, and important to us; and these beyond all comparison are the truths of religion, namely, the Being and Nature of God, man's obligations to him, and the returns which it is proper he should make for them. Man is not the cause of himself, but must have proceeded from some other, this other to be his cause, must be equal to the work, and to be so, he must have intelligence, wisdom, power, goodness, infinitely superior to his works; and be that all perfect, eternal, infinite, almighty, pure, good and incomprehensible

Spirit

Spirit, which we call God. A Being, this, who is himſelf without any foreign cauſe, and the Cauſe and Creator of all other beings; and every thing in man, and in the world which ſurrounds him, demonſtrates that there is ſuch. Now if he be the Creator of the world, he muſt love and take care of it; for it is his own work, and he would not have made it but becauſe he loved it. If he be infinite or immenſe in his Exiſtence, he muſt be every where preſent, and conſequently know the actions of every creature much better than it can itſelf. If he be pure or moral, he muſt regard the behaviour of ſuch as are moral, with an approbation or diſlike ſuitable to the good or evil nature of it, for it is right and fit that he ſhould do ſo. If he be good, he will not only create, but ſuſtain his creatures, and watch over them by his providence to do them good. If he wills their good, he muſt deſire and wiſh them to make uſe of the means which are proper to obtain it, and if he wiſhes for this, he muſt make known theſe means to them, or in other words, he muſt ſhew them his laws *: All theſe things he muſt do to them, and

* It may from hence ſeem and it has ſeemed to ſome, that the Creator muſt all at once give to every one of theſe creatures a full knowledge of all theſe laws; but this is a moſt dangerous miſtake, all that can here be neceſſary is ſo far to make them known as their happineſs will require. If then the maker of the world ſhall find out a way by which to render a very partial obedience to theſe Laws ſufficient for the happineſs of any of them; if this ſufficiency ſhall be obtained by their gradually ſinking into ſuch an ignorance of ſome of them as was very

do them in a manner conformable to their rational and moral natures, and consequently must manifest

---

very hard if at all possible to be conquered by them, and which must have rendered them less criminal and almost innocent in their breaches of them*, and if his wisdom saw that such a state would be better for them than one which was more enlightned and do more honour to him in saving them in it, why then it would be goodness in him to let them fall into this ignorance.

But if he likewise saw that to permit the whole of them to be covered with this darkness, would occasion such a total Apostacy from him and virtue as must be destructive of all happiness, that there were some among these creatures who could bear and would be benefited by a greater degree of knowledge, that the light communicated to them would be diffused among the rest and hinder them from degenerating too far, and would also give him an opportunity of better informing and reclaiming the others in such times and proportions as he should think fit, why then it would be goodness in the Divine Being to select one people from among them; and by informing them of his own Being and Nature, his Creation of them, his providence and government over them, the laws of their happiness, his hatred to vice and love to virtue, and by governing them by open and known rewards and punishments as their behaviour should deserve, it then would be goodness in him to make this one people peculiarly his own. But if he attempted these things it is manifest he must give them a revelation of them all, and for this purpose have such a history written as should contain this account, and have it authenticated by his own authority, so that no reasonable doubt shall remain of them.

* Acts 17. 30.

manifeſt himſelf to them, not only as their Creator and Suſtainer, but as their moral Governor, Inſpector, Lawgiver, Conductor, Judge.

Now if he bears theſe relations to man, a behaviour which is conformable to them muſt be man's firſt and greateſt duty. All morality and virtue conſiſts in the behaving to every being we are related to, in a manner conformable to this relation; and the higheſt and moſt important of theſe muſt ever be, that of the creature to its Creator, of the Suſtained to its Suſtainor, the Governed to its great Governor; and of the infinitely benefited to it's greateſt and moſt deſerving benefactor and friend. The bad behaviour of a Child to its worthy Father, is a moſt horrid crime; and what then muſt that be of the Man to his God? Now to anſwer theſe obligations we muſt take care to fill our ſouls with the deepeſt and moſt lively ſenſe of his Being and Government over us, and our relation to and dependence upon him, and take all proper methods to preſerve, invigorate and expreſs it; and when we do ſo, we ſhall of neceſſity fall into the practice of devout and holy prayer, we ſhall in our hearts conceive, and in our words expreſs, the perfect excellence of the Divine nature, and our own imperfection and impurity, his power and ſufficiency, and our own weakneſs, dependence, wants, his goodneſs and mercy to us, and our own unworthineſs and demerit, and ſhall from hence have our ſouls filled with gratitude, love, truſt, thankfulneſs, praiſe to him: And where we have ſinned againſt him, we ſhall ſee it to be moſt juſt and neceſſary for us, with all ſhame, fear and humility, * to confeſs

* To ſay that God is not to be feared, is to ſay, either,

confeſs and beg pardon for our faults, and entreat his aſſiſtance to overcome them for the future. Such ſentiments and expreſſions as theſe are abſolutely required of us by our relation to the Divine Being; this relation is the higheſt that can be, and prayer, therefore, which contains and expreſſes them all, muſt be to man, the firſt and greateſt of all duties, and what no one of us can neglect without falling into the greateſt baſeneſs and crime.

Nor is this duty leſs neceſſary and beneficial than it is right and important. Our all gracious Creator hath been too good to make us only for this trifling life and enjoyments of it;—No, he hath formed us for a moſt perfect and endleſs exiſtence in another, and for a complete happineſs therein; this happineſs can no way be obtained but by virtue, and the devout adoration of our God; beſides, being in itſelf the firſt of all duties, muſt above all other means contribute to make us moſt ſurely and perfectly virtuous. A deep and conſtant ſenſe of God's being and government over us, muſt be the moſt powerful motive to perſuade to virtue; and nothing can ſo effectually give and enliven this ſenſe as the conſtantly expreſſing and exerciſing all theſe affections to him, which devout prayer requires and begets. And then at the ſame time that it thus contributes to our virtue, doth it likewiſe aſſimilate us to our God, and fit us not only to bear with, but to be bleſſed by

---

either, that the Creator has made no particular means neceſſary to our happineſs, or that we ſhall obtain this happineſs, although we uſe not but contradict theſe means, both which poſitions we certainly experience to be falſe.

by his all perfect holineſs and excellence, which when we can reliſh, and they are given us to enjoy they muſt prove a delight to us as much beyond that which any creature can yield, as his infinity is ſuperior to its finiteneſs.

This is a ſhort and imperfect ſketch of that part of Religion which regards our God; and it is ſo peculiarly neceſſary, enobling, beneficial, that the man who is by his nature rendered capable of it *, ſhall fall into the greateſt baſeneſs and crime when he neglects, and much more when he deſpiſes this duty. And therefore Religion which commands ſuch a fit, juſt, and noble behaviour to ourſelves, our fellow Creatures, and our Creator, ought to be the eſtimation, the care, and the boaſt of all mankind. And here it is to be obſerved, that if our all gracious Governor hath contrived and made known to us any way by which to render ſuch an imperfect adoration, as man can give, acceptable to him, we muſt, as we will hope that he ſhall receive it from our hands, perform it in the manner which he hath preſcribed to us.

Hitherto

---

* It is certain that the wiſeſt of the Heathen Philoſophers did not diſcover the true nature of God, man's relation to him or the worſhip with which he was to be ſerved, the end of man, nor even the juſt behaviour which they owed to each other, and yet to us it appears that they may be and are ſufficiently proved from reaſon, this then our preſent knowledge muſt have ariſen from ſomething elſe than reaſon, and the truth is, it hath ariſen from Chriſtianity, which by diſcovering ſuch a behaviour to be our duty, hath made us ſee the reaſonableneſs of it.

Hitherto religion appears in a moſt amiable light, and were we to go no farther in our enquiries about it, there doubtleſs would be none to object to it. But we muſt go much farther in them, we muſt inſiſt upon it as an abſolutely neceſſary qualification for the high, pure, and perfect happineſs which the Creator in his goodneſs hath deſigned for man, and therefore reſerved to another life, becauſe impoſſible to be had in the preſent; and which if we have not before properly acquired, we can have no happineſs there, but muſt be loſt for ever and overwhelmed with a remedileſs and endleſs miſery. A declaration this, awful to all ſuch creatures, but ſo horrible to the many luxurious and vitious among us, that true chriſtianity, which is above all religions the moſt expreſs and clear in this matter, is by theſe gentlemen hated above all others, and the teachers of it therefore treated with a ſuitable averſion and abuſe. But as our opinions will not alter the nature of things, and if this be really the conſtitution of them which God hath eſtabliſhed, we muſt either comply with it, or be undone by it; ſo it is our buſineſs, the greateſt of all our buſineſs, moſt carefully and impartially to enquire into it, and to regulate our conduct by what we find to be the truth. And however dark and difficult this ſubject may ſeem, yet can it be cleared up and to a fullneſs of conviction.

SECTION II.

It will readily be allowed that the divine Being muſt be ſupremely and infinitely good, and that we may with the greateſt certainty argue from that attribute. Now if he be good, the end

end of all creation muſt have been to communicate happineſs, and by three ways we can ſee that this glorious purpoſe may be accompliſhed; by ſenſation, by reaſon, and by morality. If the Creator makes nothing but dead matter, he communicates no happineſs at all; if animals only capable of ſenſation, but a very low degree of it; if he adds reaſon to ſenſation, he will greatly enlarge and enoble the ſphere of enjoyment, and if he ſuperadds morality to theſe two, he will exalt and perfect it to the higheſt degree.

It is eaſy to ſee that reaſon gives the animal great advantages above ſenſation alone, for it furniſhes him with many other and more valuable gratifications. It enables him to provide better for himſelf in this world; it delights and bleſſes him with the mutual communications, protection, aſſiſtance, good offices of ſociety, without which this reaſonable creature would be the moſt expoſed, weak, wanting, and miſerable of all animals, and from which he reaps many of the moſt material benefits; it fills and delights him with the knowledge of the reaſon and nature, and contrivance, and goodneſs of things, and gratifies his ſoul with the uſing the product, the diſcoveries of reaſon; and from hence draws him on to find out and to know that there is a God, who is the maker of all things, who is an infinite fund of all perfection and excellence, and whom if it be not his own monſtrous fault, he may render the greateſt of bleſſings to himſelf. And as this laſt particular, the diſcovering our God and our obligations to him, is out of all compariſon the moſt important and valuable effect of reaſon, ſo muſt it moſt certainly be the principal end for which reaſon was given.

By

By these means may the happiness of the rational creature be greatly enlarged beyond that of the brute; but then it is easy to observe that all these advantages may be, nay, must be, lost by a perversion of reason, and that then it will become the worst of evils to this creature. For it may be so applied as to sink him, but the more deeply and perniciously in sense; and so as to destroy his health, his relish, his means of comfort and subsistence, his life: To render him but the more hurtful to society, and society the more prejudicial to him: To make him contemn all the most worthy and useful knowledge, and to mind only the perversion and baseness and villainies of it; and instead of delighting and improving his mind by the knowledge and love of the supreme Being and his infinite perfection, to make him hate and avoid the thoughts of him, and do all that he can to banish him from his own world. All these evils may this noble faculty of reason produce, and it will and must produce them if improperly applied; and therefore wherever reason is given, there must be another faculty added to direct the use of it, and make it produce it's proper and intended good; and this faculty is a moral sense, a sense by which the creature shall discern when it properly applies or misapplies it's reason, and find itself obliged to act as this faculty directs, and this moral sense, man certainly hath.

He is made to perceive, to feel, that there is a right and a wrong in many of his actions, which renders the performance of them either fit, honourable, virtuous and deserving of esteem and reward; or unfit, base, criminal, and deserving of hatred and punishment, and from hence is made to know that there is an obligation laid upon

upon him to do the one and avoid the other. This moral ſenſe man certainly hath; nor is it poſſible to ſpeak of him or his affairs without making an appeal to it, without our ſhewing our approbation or diſlike of his behaviour, nor do I believe it poſſible ever to be extinguiſhed in any man; and if it were, he would then fall into the greateſt degredation of himſelf that ſuch a creature is capable of. For what kind of man would he be who ſaw no difference between right or wrong, nor made any in his behaviour to his fellow Creatures? He could not be called a man, he would be turned into a moſt pernicious and deteſtable brute. Now by this governing faculty of a moral ſenſe, the man finds himſelf obliged to apply his reaſon and underſtanding to thoſe things which will the moſt enoble and benefit himſelf, render him moſt ſerviceable to ſociety, with the good of which his own is inſeparably connected, and will cauſe him to know, and reliſh, and love the divine excellence, and ſo to be made bleſſed by it. And by having thus fixed his affections and deſires upon the moſt worthy and bliſsful objects, and purſuing them alone, and this in proportion to their worth, he becomes not only ſure of the greateſt enjoyment; but conſcious of ſelf-worth, conſcious that he is lovely, eſtimable, and deſerving of happineſs, and from hence to hope with an aſſurance for it, and have his ſoul exult with this proſpect and this feeling of ſelf-worth. But if the man ſhall go on to contradict in his practice this governing faculty, he will, to all the forementioned evils of a perverſion of reaſon, add this horrible one likewiſe, that he will then find himſelf to be baſe, hateful, criminal, undeſerving of eſteem or happineſs, deſerving of averſion and puniſhment, and ever

fearful of it. An evil this ſo great, that there never was a profligate who did not contrive to avoid it, by imagining ſomething of worth in himſelf, ſomething for which he deſerved eſteem.

This muſt be the caſe with every animal who is endowed with theſe two exalted faculties of reaſon and morality: that is, who by his nature is raiſed to a ſuperiority above the brutes; and as man is unqueſtionably this animal, ſo muſt it be unqueſtionably the caſe with him. He is then obliged to conform to the obligations which theſe higher faculties lay upon him, and this from the right of the thing alone, though there were not to be another life after this. But can this indeed be the caſe with him; and muſt he periſh for ever when Death puts an end to his preſent life? No, it cannot be ſo with him. That infinite wiſdom and goodneſs which hath given man ſuch an exalted nature, and from hence a capacity for ſuch high and noble gratifications, can never have pinned him down to thoſe which are ſo momentary in their continuance, and ſo imperfect and inferior to his nature in their enjoyments, as he can at the beſt receive in this life. No, he muſt have made him for a long, a full enjoyment of them; and if for any thing like this, muſt have principally created him for a future life of infinitely greater perfection; and his governing faculty of a moral ſenſe puts it beyond queſtion that ſo it ſhall be with him.

That man is entirely baſe and wrong who is not governed by morality; but this faculty is ſo far from confining him to this world, that it always requires him to act above it, in many caſes in direct oppoſition to it. In actions wherein morality is concerned, it will not permit him to regard the good or evil conſequences which are to

follow

follow from them in this life, but the right or wrong of the thing; and requires him to go ſuch a length in this matter as that he ſhall ſacrifice all the goods of this life, and even life itſelf, and this by the moſt cruel of deaths to his virtue; and makes him think beſt of himſelf and others when they do ſo, and know that they deſerve then the moſt to be careſſed. Whereby if there be no other life the man muſt beſides all other evils loſe his very Being, for the doing of that which his God wills him to do, hath obliged him to do, muſt love him for having done. Theſe things cannot be ſo, it is palpable, it is certain that they cannot; and therefore there muſt be a future life for this worthy man to be rewarded, to be made happy in; wherein we may be ſure that he ſhall receive a recompence great as his merit, and high as his nature will admit of. The divine rectitude and goodneſs are moſt high and abſolutely perfect, and this is a conſequence which muſt neceſſarily follow from them.

SECTION III.

MAN is made for another life, and if there be another he hath good grounds to conclude that he is immortal, and ſhall there enjoy a happineſs adequate to his nature. If the ſoul can ſurvive ſuch a total deſtruction as Death makes of the body, there is no reaſon to think it can be deſtroyed by any other, and this will be ſuch a confirmation of what the goodneſs of the Creator ſeems to require, namely, that he ſhould make ſuch a valuable creature as man for a very long or endleſs exiſtence, and of what it's own nature ſeems to point out; namely, that it is ſo ſpiritual and ſimple as to admit of no ſeparation of parts,

and conſequently diſſolution and power of dying, that it ought to be reckoned concluſive. And that the Divine Goodneſs made man to communicate happineſs, and requires him to act in this world with a ſuperior regard to the happineſs of the next, demonſtrates that it is there he is to expect his higheſt happineſs, and that it ſhall then be ſuch as will fill and moſt highly pleaſe his whole nature.

Let us ſuppoſe the man to have his body and all its ſenſations greatly ſtrengthened, exalted, ſpiritualized, and rendered capable of affording its higheſt delights; let us ſuppoſe his reaſon to be ſo encreaſed as to ſhew him much more of what is good for him, and much more to exalt his knowledge and render him more pleaſed with it; and let us ſuppoſe him to be ſo thoroughly improved and fixed in virtue, as to have an entire maſtery over all his lower appetites and paſſions, and to love, and deſire, and chuſe only thoſe things which are beſt and moſt excellent, and will make him moſt happy in himſelf and beneficial to all others, and above all which will make him delight in and be bleſſed by the infinite excellence and holineſs of the Divine Being: and let us ſuppoſe him in this ſtate of virtue and fitneſs for the moſt perfect bliſs, to be along with all others, the virtuous put into a place peculiarly made for his happineſs, and in which he ſhall have the infinite perfection of his God to enjoy, and all this to be for ever enſured to him, and what an inconceiveably bleſſed condition muſt this be! But then it is to be obſerved, that to be capable of this happineſs, the man muſt be virtuous, and entirely virtuous, and ſecure of continuing ſo, and ſecure of living for ever in it. For without this virtue he could be no happineſs, he muſt be

a plague

a plague to himſelf and his aſſociates, and muſt above all things hate and reject from him, and be hated and rejected by his all holy God: and if capable of ceaſing from his happineſs, could never have any right enjoyment in it, and this the more ſo, as the happineſs was great from which he was to be ſeparated.

We muſt then be exalted and confirmed in virtue to enjoy the high bleſſedneſs for which man muſt have been deſigned, but how ſhall this virtue be acquired? Were we left in this matter to reaſon alone, there might be ſome difficulty in returning an anſwer; but with the experience we have, there is none. I reply then that it ſhall be by a previous probation, wherein we ſhall be exerciſed and trained up to virtue, and ſuch a ſtate is our preſent life beyond all controverſy. It is no ſtate of reward, for it never perfectly diſtributes to us that juſtice which our behaviour deſerves, it ſometimes runs directly contradictory to it, and it requires us not to expect ſuch a retribution here or to act upon it. It is then a ſtate of probation, and we experience it to be ſo. We are made every thing, we are even made reaſonable by exerciſe and habit. It is by theſe means that we acquire all knowledge, all fitneſs for arts or ſcience, or trade, or civil ſociety itſelf, and this is ſtill more peculiarly the caſe with regard to religion. The more we neglect the faculties of reaſon and morality, and the high obligations and enjoyments reſulting from them, and abandon ourſelves to low brutiſh ſenſe, the leſs able we ſhall be to raiſe ourſelves above ſenſe, to reliſh any things but thoſe of ſenſe, or to reſiſt its moſt abominable and pernicious emotions; 'till at the laſt we ſhall grow to ſuch a paſs as to love and care for the pleaſures of ſenſe alone, deſpiſe eve-

ry thing elſe, and make our reaſon and morality entirely ſubſervient to it. But the more we habituate ourſelves to the uſe and cultivation and government of theſe high qualities, and the enjoyments reſulting from them, the more we ſhall love them, and the more ready, ſecure, bleſſed we ſhall be in the practice of them; till as by the former means the man becomes totally abandoned to ſenſuality and vice, ſo by the latter confirmed in reaſonableneſs and virtue. This is beyond queſtion the ſtate of man in this life, and this is beyond queſtion a ſtate of probation or trial.

But if it be ſo, we muſt as we value our happineſs, moſt carefully conſider and have regard to the conſequence of it.—If this life be any part of our probation, it will be exceſſive folly for us to go on in theſe paths which muſt ſet our happineſs at a greater diſtance from us, and make the acquiſition of it more difficult and uncertain. If we cannot be ſure of having any other trial, this folly will become more great and dangerous; but if we have any grounds to conclude, that this preſent life ſhall be our only probation, it will then be worſe than madneſs to perſevere in that courſe which muſt end in abſolute and final ruin: a ruin not only by the loſs of all happineſs, but by entailing a poſitive miſery upon us as long as our Being ſhall laſt. For this wrongneſs of nature which will not ſuffer us to enjoy the happineſs we were deſigned for, muſt render us miſerable, and to an exceſſive degree. For the perſon with his whole nature perverted and vitiated, with his deſires and love fixed upon ſuch things as are impoſſible to be had, or unworthy of him, or incapable of ſatisfying him, or pernicious to him, with his paſſions ſet looſe from all government,

ment, and enraged and turned upon him; with his mind poſſeſſed by ſelf-condemnation and loathing, and filled with remorſe, ſhame, ſorrow, anger, rage, falſehood, envy, malice, which muſt make him a plague to himſelf and every one connected with him; and with an averſion from and an abhorrence of his all holy God, in whom and by whom he muſt ſubſiſt: with all theſe calamities upon him, he muſt not only be deſtitute of all happineſs, but overwhelmed with miſery. And to complete his ruin, he muſt for the happineſs of the virtuous and all thoſe who are capable of happineſs be totally ſecluded from their ſociety, and confined to ſuch companions as are wrong in their nature, falſe, miſerable, pernicious as himſelf. And how horrid an evil muſt this prove?

And here we have a full anſwer to that cavil upon which all infidelity is founded, that we cannot ſuppoſe the all-gracious and good Creator would make any creature to render it miſerable, as chriſtianity ſays he will do; for here we ſee that his very goodneſs which hath cauſed him to create beings ſuperior to brutes, doth neceſſarily ſubject them to this condition. They muſt according to their free and accountable natures qualify themſelves for the happineſs proper to them, or elſe loſe it, and be miſerable for ever. But the objection is ſtrong and obvious, the ſolution deep and diſtant, and therefore never diſcovered by thoſe careleſs, ſhallow and prejudiced reaſoners.

Whatever kind of trial then this life may be, we are bound in all reaſon and prudence to look well to our behaviour in it, and ſee that it be ſuch as our rational and moral natures require. Our whole experience here even in this ſtate of probation, ſhew us that we muſt take care of our-

ſelves

ſelves or be undone by our neglect. And this obligation is the more forcible, becauſe we have ſure grounds to go upon, that this preſent life will be our only ſtate of trial. We can have no probation but in a body ſuch as is our preſent one, but that we ſhall after death have a reſurrection to a new one for this purpoſe, will not be thought probable. Beſides we can in many caſes diſcern that it cannot be done. Where any of our people go out of this world ſo hardened in vice as to become irreclaimable from it, it would not only be uſeleſs, but pernicious to them to have another probation; and where they go out ſo habituated to virtue as that they can be ſecured in it, it would be to the ſame evil effect, and we have ſure reaſon to believe that this is the caſe with many.

For we find that no evil, however certain the conſequence, can ſtop them in their vices, but they will go on with them till deſtruction overtakes them. It is moſt probable then from reaſon that our only probation will be in this life; but as this is a matter of ſuch infinite importance, it would ſeem that ſome revelation of it to take away all doubt might be expected from that Creator whoſe goodneſs is the cauſe of all creation. But if any revelation is allowed, that of Chriſtianity will not be denied, and then the caſe is decided for us. For this religion declares that our ſtate of retribution depends upon our works in this life; and as ſoon as a reſurrection comes, judgment is immediately to follow.

SECT.

SECTION IV.

A probation then we muſt have, we experience that we have in this life, and of what kind it ought to be it is now fit to enquire.

For rational and moral creatures to be happy, they muſt be virtuous, and to be certain and complete in their happineſs they muſt be fixed and entire in virtue, and to be brought to this ſtate they muſt have a previous probation; but of what kind this ought to be none but the Creator can tell. He only to whom the whole of their nature and exiſtence is open, the guards which are neceſſary to be ſet between them and vice, the particular virtues which their future happineſs will moſt require, and their trial will give, as likewiſe all the effects which this ſpecies and every other ſpecies of trial which infinity can invent, will have upon them and all other creatures can tell this. And ſtill more palpably he only can tell it, who ſees and hath power to adminiſter all the remedies which infinite w fdom can diſcover, for removing any evil accident which may happen in it; for by theſe means that ſpecies which would have been in itſelf the very worſt, may be rendered the beſt of all probations. And ſtill more palpably he only can tell this, who is able to diſcern what providence will beſt ſhew forth the Divine Nature and workings, ſo as to do moſt honour to himſelf and ſervice to his creatures, by exerciſing, gratifying, and improving their reaſon and morality. Dead matter can make no oppoſition to his will, yet in the formation of this we find a power, contrivance, wiſdom, goodneſs exerted, worthy and demonſtrative of his infinity, and moſt pleaſing to man, but infinitely beyond his

his capacity thoroughly to underſtand. And much more muſt this be the caſe in his moral government of his moral creatures, who to be happy muſt be virtuous, who to be virtuous muſt be free, and who if they be free, will be frequently flying off from that rule of right to which all happineſs is and muſt be annexed, and thereby introducing evil inſtead of the Creator's deſigned good into his Creation. Theſe are things of the greateſt difficulty, and wherein Divine Providence muſt be moſt complicate and dark, and in them therefore are we to look for ſuch wonderful workings as are above the reach of all Creatures, and ſhall by their contrivance, and power, demonſtrate the infinity of that Being from whom they proceed. Beſides, as he hath given us his material creation to exerciſe, and delight, and improve our reaſon, much more muſt he by his moral workings intend to have the ſame effect upon our morality, to which the happineſs of all that is valuable in his creation is annexed; and therefore in theſe it is that he is to diſplay, and we are to expect ſuch amazing providences as his own head can contrive, his own hand can only execute.

The Creator alone then can know what kind of trial will be beſt for any of his Creatures, but our ſtate of trial is our ſtate of religion, and therefore it is impoſſible for any poſition to be more certainly and deſtructively falſe than this, one, with which all Infidelity begins and ends, namely, that we can neither need nor receive any thing more in religion, than what human reaſon, nay, and every man's own reaſon can of itſelf diſcover, when it is now moſt plain and certain that the very reverſe muſt be true.

But

But although we cannot discover what kind of trial may be fit for any of us, yet we can see many particulars about these matters, and they are of the greatest importance. We can see that different degrees of perfection, or rather imperfection in the moral Agent, will render a different probation necessary. All sin and liableness to it proceeds from imperfection, and as every creature must be finite, and consequently imperfect, so from hence liable to sin. If its knowledge be imperfect, it may think that to be good, which is not good, or not so in its present circumstances, and so by chusing it fall into natural evil, and if its moral sense be imperfect, he may by the seeming good of the thing be drawn in to set his affections so violently upon it, that his desire of enjoyment shall prove too great for his moral sense to govern, and he shall therefore chuse it, when he knows or ought to know that he is wrong in so doing, and thereby fall into sin and moral evil. This is the cause of all sin; and therefore as we are more or less perfect in reason and morality, so must we be so much more or less liable to sin, and we will therefore require that a difference be made in our probation, which shall be suitable to our various capacities. All creatures to be preserved from sin, must have a knowledge not only of the good of virtue, but more especially of the evil of vice. To some of a very high nature possibly a declaration of this evil may be a sufficient preservative, to others who are lower, the seeing the evil effects of it upon others; to those of an inferior perfection, the feeling themselves some of the miseries of it, and to those who are lowest of all, the experiencing these miseries to an excessive degree to weakness, sickness, pain, death in the body, and so self-

condemnation,

condemnation, ſhame, ſorrow, remorſe, fear in the ſoul. To moral creatures of the loweſt nature, the experiencing all theſe miſeries may be neceſſary to preſerve them in virtue, to ſecure them from vice, and it muſt be confeſſed that no other means can be ſo powerful for this purpoſe to creatures who are free to chuſe, and moral creatures muſt ever be ſo*.

But how can ſuch a probation as this be given? There are ſeveral things in it which ſeem to render it impoſſible. The perfect rectitude of the Creator will not ſuffer him to make any creature in ſuch a way as that it muſt neceſſarily fall into ſin, and if he then falls it muſt be his own voluntary choice, and conſequently his fault, and if his fault he will then neither deſerve or doth he ſeem to be capable of receiving mercy and happineſs. How great ſo ever the evils be which are felt from ſin, we do not find the perſon ſtrengthened but weakened by his fall. He from hence becomes but the more inclinable to vice, the more eaſy and ready to run into it, the more difficult to be reclaimed from it; nor can he even think of reformation till he can be aſſured of a pardon for his paſt crimes. This will be the natural conſequence of a commiſſion of ſin, and this without ſome moſt favourable interpoſition of the Divine Being on his behalf, cannot be advantageous but muſt be entirely deſtructive to the ſinner. But this

* Vice ever puts on an alluring appearance and can only tempt to ſin by the promiſe of ſome mighty advantage or pleaſure; but nothing can ſo effectually take off this bait as the perſon's having before experienced quite the reverſe to follow from it, namely, diſappointment and miſery, and this therefore muſt prove the moſt powerful diſſuaſive poſſible from ſin.

this interpofition he is fo far from deferving, that he merits quite the reverfe, even hatred and punifhment inftead of favour and affiftance; and every thing which he can difcern in his cafe feems to fhew that the former of thefe muft be his melancholy portion. The perfect holinefs of the Creator muft hold fuch a finner in abhorrence, and the good of all that is valuable in his creation doth manifeftly require, that no encouragement be given to vice, no neglect or contempt be fhewn to virtue. But to pafs over the numberlefs and provoking fins, it might be of a whole race of accountable creatures without any punifhment inflicted upon their crimes; nay and to treat them with the greateft favour and acceptance inftead of it, would carry with it fuch a manifeft difregard to morality, as neither the Divine Purity nor the good of his creatures would permit. It would doubtlefs prove prejudicial, it might be fatal to the virtue and happinefs of the whole creation.

It is impoffible then that this finner can be faved, without having fome means found out, which fhall render him deferving of mercy, and this muft be by fuch as fhall not at leaft be prejudicial if not profitable to the caufe of virtue. But how can this be done? Not by the finner himfelf, we have feen that it cannot; it muft then come from fome other, and this other muft be his God †. No Creature can give us when once fallen, the wanted affiftance to recover from it; nor can any creature by any thing it could do or fuffer upon the other's account make any compenfation for his fin, and efpecially for the fins

† Rom. 1. 4.

of a whole offending and profligate world, ſo as to render the forgiveneſs of their tranſgreſſions not detrimental to the cauſe of virtue. To be a creature he muſt have received all that he has, he muſt be finite, he muſt be imperfect; but if he be ſuch he can never give more than he owes, and muſt ever be ſhort in his own obedience, and therefore can never make any compenſation for the faults of others, he muſt rather want ſuch for himſelf. But we need not dwell upon this matter becauſe we ſhall immediately ſee that there have been much better means, found out for this purpoſe than any Creature could conceive. For how impoſſible ſoever it may be to them it may not be ſo to the Divine Being: and if we find any race of creatures innocently in this condition, we may be ſure that their all-gracious Creator hath not left them in it; but hath afforded them proper means to ſave themſelves if it be not their own faults, and they may with confidence look up to and expect to receive ſuch from his hands.

SECTION V.

If any remedy can be given to the evil conſequence of ſinning, it muſt be by having ſome ſatisfaction made for it, which ſhall render the forgiving of ſin not detrimental to the cauſe of virtue, and by which ſuch aſſiſtance ſhall be conveyed to the ſinner, as ſhall enable him to reform from it and prevent him from being perverted to a habit of vice, by his having already fallen. But if both theſe purpoſes can be obtained, and much better obtained by ſome divine interpoſition than by any other means: if this interpoſition will ſerve more effectually to encourage

courage to virtue and diſcourage from vice, and the creature ſhall thereby be more ſtrengthened and exalted in virtue and happineſs, it will then be moſt highly good in the Creator to give him this trial, and this goodneſs will be encreaſed if there ſhall be occaſion taken from hence, to adminiſter ſuch providences, as will above all others the beſt open and do moſt honour to the Divine Being, and ſhew him forth in the moſt juſt, lovely, and beneficial appearance.

In ſuch circumſtances as theſe it will be moſt highly good in the Creator to give theſe creatures an experimental knowledge of the evil of ſin, and if his own purity will forbid his making them in ſuch a way as neceſſarily to ſubject them to ſin, he may ſuffer them to be brought into it by ſome temptation which he foreſees will be too hard for their virtue. And to render them truly deſerving of compaſſion and ſuccour, he may permit the more ignorant and weak, and innocent to be tempted by the more crafty and powerful and evil creature, and this by a bait to which his very virtue may entice him, and may likewiſe have annexed ſuch conſequences to the fall of one, as ſhall involve others in his crime and puniſhment; and by thus making them ſuffer for the fault of another, thereby render it fit and indeed neceſſary for himſelf to interpoſe and ſave them by ſome extraordinary providence. Now if any race of moral creatures find themſelves in this very condition; if they do all ſin and have all an experience of the evil of ſin, and can only be ſaved by having a pardon of ſin and an aſſiſtance to overcome it, and if theſe creatures have been put into this condition without any fault of their own, even born in it, they may as certainly as their God is good expect

ſome remedy from his hands, and they are bound in all reaſon carefully to enquire whether he hath not afforded them ſuch, and if he hath, to receive it with the greateſt readineſs and gratitude.

Now ſuch is the caſe of man in every particular, he is a ſinner, he is born ſuch, and he muſt, if at all, be ſaved by ſome extraordinary divine interpoſition; and Chriſtianity tells us that ſuch is the caſe with him. It tells us that mankind was ſo created as all of them to deſcend from one common parent, that this man was made in a ſtate of perfection and virtue, but overpowered by a more crafty adverſary and a violent temptation, he quickly fell from his integrity, that his fall was occaſioned by his love to morality, his deſire of knowing evil from good, which muſt have been the moſt violent temptation poſſible to him, and which if he could have obtained with innocence it would have been right to purſue; that the conſequence of his fall extended to all his poſterity, and ſubjected them all to his weakneſs and puniſhment, namely, to ſinfulneſs and death. But it likewiſe tells us that the goodneſs of the Creator did not leave us in this ruinous condition, but hath afforded us a complete deliverance from it, if it be not our own fault. For it tell us that the redemption covertly predicted to Adam was openly fulfilled in Chriſt; for God ſo loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, to the end that all who believe in him ſhould not periſh but have everlaſting life, and that it was his eternal purpoſe ſo to do. That this Son of his by taking our nature upon him, and giving to the Father in our ſtead an abſolutely perfect obedience, and certainly ſuch as no other creature ever performed, and by dying at the laſt for us in all the tortures of the croſs, to make an

atonement

atonement for ſin, thereby render to God ſuch a full expiation for the crimes of the whole world, that they ſhall all be forgiven if the traſgreſſor will repent and amend, and to enable us to do this and to give that progreſſive but imperfect obedience which muſt qualify us for the perfect happineſs of the next life, hath he procured for us the renovation and aſſiſtance of the Divine Spirit, whoſe infinite nature muſt render him equal to this arduous work. And theſe mercies have been obtained by ſuch a method as muſt above all others moſt powerfully perſuade to virtue and diſſwade from vice. For he who underwent ſuch debaſement and miſeries to procure us thoſe bleſſings, was yet that eternal and almighty Creator, by whom and for whom all things in heaven and earth, whether they be thrones or dominions, principalities or powers, were created and do ſubſiſt. And here in ſuch a perſon's doing ſuch things to ſatisfy for ſin, and render weak and fallen man capable of mercy or aſſiſtance, have we ſuch a regard ſhewn to virtue, as nothing elſe, no not the irretrievably damning all thoſe who have in the leaſt offended, could equal or come near to. For what muſt that love to morality be which could bring upon himſelf ſuch a degredation and miſery? and what muſt his love to his creatures be when it could influence him to undertake ſuch things for their ſake? And here have we a moſt wonderful method taken of opening to us the Divine nature, and of demonſtrating to us by actions worthy and expreſſive of their divinity, that the Son and the Holy Ghoſt are God as well as the Father. And in this have we men a manifeſtation of the moſt grand, expenſive, and wonderful providence made in our favour, that the infinity of the

Divine Being hath ever afforded, or ever will afford †.

---

† If any creature is made to depend upon another for its greatest good, a similar treatment of it may be expected in other instances; and so it is with man to a surprizing degree. It is owing to others of his own species that he ever has any being, and that this being is preserved to him, from those doth he derive that constitution both of body and soul which makes up his nature, and upon the wisdom or folly and virtue or vice of them, and their progenitors, and their care or neglect in his education and the provision which they make for him doth he materially depend for his welfare both in this and the future world. And here it is most worthy of observation that as the lowness of man made the most cautious and strengthening of probations necessary to him, so is he by this means furnished with it.

The passions of the man are born with the child to set him properly at work and breed him up to be the creature he is intended for, but to prevent him from hasty and destructive choices all power of self gratification is for years denied to him. He can have neither food nor enjoyment but as they are given by others, and these by nature interested in his welfare, and he is by them long restrained from what he most loves, and compelled to mind other things he does not like, and these restraints are only lessened to him as he gains more experienced knowledge and becomes better able to manage himself. And thus is he for the beginning and a considerable part of his life conducted by the superior wisdom and caution of others, and benefitted or hurt in the most material degree by their right or wrong treatment of him in these matters, it may be to absolute safety or ruin. And is this the creature who shall quarrel with Christianity for telling him he has fallen in Adam and been redeemed by Christ!

Well

Well then might the Creator form man in ſuch a way as that he ſhould come into the condition already deſcribed, when he himſelf was determined to afford ſo complete a remedy to all the evils which ſhould ariſe from it, and thereby do ſuch peculiar honour to himſelf and good to all his creatures. And here it is to be obſerved, that as no expence was ſtuck at in Chriſtianity to ſave man, ſo hath every thing in it been contrived with a peculiar regard to his advantage. The whole of his virtue and happineſs muſt ever depend upon theſe things, that he is fully aſſured of having another life after this, that it ſhall be immenſe and endleſs in its continuance and retributions, that theſe ſhall be diſtributed to him as he by his virtue or vice here ſhall deſerve, that he a ſinner ſhall have a pardon of his ſins, whenever he will repent and amend; that he hath ſtrength ſufficient to accompliſh this work whenever he will honeſtly undertake it; that his very imperfect ſervices ſhall yet be accepted by his all holy God, that he can be ſure of a ſufficient protection againſt all the adverſaries of his ſoul, that his behaviour in this life ſhall for ever decide his fate, and that he ſhall be acquitted and made everlaſtingly and inconceiveably happy by the final judgment of God if he lives up to the eaſy terms of the goſpel.

Theſe are the things upon which all his virtue muſt ever depend, and of all theſe have we not only the moſt poſitive and clear declarations by Chriſtianity, but our redemption hath been ſo modelled as to give us the moſt advantageous conviction in every particular of them. The dying and riſing again of our Redeemer have proved the reality of a future life even to our ſenſes; his undertaking ſuch things to ſave us in

it;

it; the infinite importance of it; his enduring ſuch miſeries to ſatisfy for ſin ſhews the extreme evil nature of ſin and neceſſity of virtue; his raiſing his body from death, which was the penalty of ſin, and which he was to cancel for us, and aſcending into heaven and ſending down the gifts of his holy ſpirit, demonſtrate his having overcome death ſatisfied for ſin, and procured for us the promiſed pardon of it; his giving us the aſſiſtance of the holy ſpirit enſures us of a ſtrength ſufficient to overcome any of our own weakneſs, or any power of our enemies; this ſpirit inſpiring, and his and the Son's mediating with the Father for us, makes us certain of an acceptance with him, however unworthy ourſelves and our ſervices; our Redeemer's governing all things, and having all power in Heaven and Earth lodged in his hands, afford us a protection that nothing can overcome; that as ſoon as the ſoul is reunited to the body, the laſt judgment comes, ſhews that this preſent life is our only probation, and that it is to Chriſt himſelf we are to anſwer in judgment, puts it out of all queſtion that we ſhall be made finally happy upon the eaſy and ſafe terms of the Goſpel of Faith in Chriſt, and repentance from dead works. And all theſe things ſhew ſuch an infinity of love in the Divine Being, and regard to our happineſs, and furniſh ſuch an aſſurance of our ſalvation in everlaſting bliſs and glory, as are fitted to give us even in this life a conſiderable foretaſte of that bleſſedneſs which is reſerved for us in the life to come. Marvellous are thy works, Lord God Almighty, juſt and true are thy judgments, thou King of Saints. Allelujah.

And here it is eaſy to obſerve that to have Chriſtianity made this proper means of ſalvation

to

to man, the natures of all the persons concerned in producing it must be made known to him; for without this it can never give him the high motives to virtue, nor the wanted security of happiness, nor proper knowledge of the Divine Being and goodness, in which the very essence of all religion and happiness must ever consist; but instead of elevating and engrossing our love to God, the very end of all religious worship, must lessen it to him, and give away a great part of it to these two deserving creatures who have redeemed and sanctified us in such an astonishing manner, and to whom we are under such infinite obligations.

And here also it is easy to observe, that if the author of nature hath appointed this redemption to be the means of saving sinful man, the wilful rejection of these means must prove as fatal to the soul, as the casting the man into a devouring fire, or under a falling mountain, must prove fatal to the body. The constitution of nature will be held to in the one instance as well as the other †. And now how astonishing is that perversion

† Our Saviour informs us that he who is not in him is a withered branch which is to be cast out and burned, and that he will in his last judgment deny that man to be his, who will here deny him, and St. John tells us, that he who hath not the Son hath not life, but the wrath of God abideth on him. Most awful declarations these, but just as they are terrible, for the wilful rejection of Christianity is such an insolent casting away of all the means which this religion tells us that the divine wisdom and goodness hath established for the salvation of the world, that if it be true, this man must perish in his rejection of it.

Christianity,

verſion which can make ſo many of our people reject a religion which gives us ſuch a certainty of life, glory, happineſs, endleſs and inconceivably

---

Chriſtianity, and all experience joins with it, makes man a ſinner who only can be ſaved by an exceſs of mercy and forgiveneſs, it tells us that this forgiveneſs has been only obtained by the perfect obedience and moſt cruel ſufferings and death of the Son of God, made man, and dying upon the croſs to procure this pardon for us; but tells us that whenever we become ſo ſenſible of our own impurity and unworthineſs and of the divine holineſs and juſtice as to know that we cannot ourſelves deſerve any pardon, and therefore with a true repentance for ſin apply for it only through the merits of our Redeemer, that it ſhall be granted to us: this religion tells us that we are in ourſelves and ſervices too impure to have any acceptance with the all holy Father, but that we ſhall through the mediation of Jeſus Chriſt, be certain to obtain it; that we abſolutely need the renovation of the holy ſpirit of God to aſſiſt us here and new create us hereafter, to make us capable of the happineſs of heaven; but that by our honeſtly aſking it through Jeſus Chriſt in prayer here, both theſe will be granted to us: all theſe means doth Chriſtianity require for our ſalvation, but every one of theſe doth our Infidel caſt from him with contempt and ſcorn. The ſinful and obnoxious will either deny himſelf to be a ſinner, or elſe will ſtand upon it that he needs not nor will receive any expiation for ſin, the wicked and impure will demand acceptance from perfect holineſs and juſtice, and reject the all deſerving and powerful mediation of Chriſt when offered to him; and the naturally feeble and prone to ſin and alienated from God will rely upon his own ſtrength and perfection, and ſpurn from him the offered aſſiſtance of his God.

All

ably great, and upon ſuch eaſy, ſuch profitable terms, and breed in the ſoul ſuch an antipathy to it, and the teachers of it, that even a Junius † ſhall make it a badge of all baſeneſs to be appointed to this office.

All theſe things doth every Infidel among us, and almoſt always, becauſe he is the greater ſinner; and therefore if the means of Chriſtianity be really the means of ſalvation to men, this perſon muſt of neceſſity periſh in his rejection of them. And more eſpecially as he adds this ſin to the reſt, that he hereby either denies that there ever was ſuch a perſon as Chriſt, or elſe makes him a villainous impoſtor.

† This is not ſaid in praiſe of the virtue but the abilities of Junius, which are great indeed, and which ought and which would, if properly uſed, have given him a totally different opinion of Chriſtianity from what he appears to entertain.

F I N I S.

FINIS.